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Chairman Tierney Keynotes at AFRICOM Conference

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congressman John F. Tierney (D-MA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, keynoted at AFRICOM: An Independent Review for the New Administration. This conference event was organized by the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (CADS) and is designed to provide an impartial forum for Africans, U.S. government personnel, and other interested stakeholders to discuss current challenges and opportunities for the U.S. Africa Command.

As Chairman of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee for the House Oversight Committee, Tierney has embraced his role as an investigator to attack waste, fraud and abuse, and to help to secure our long-term national security. Since becoming Chairman of the Subcommittee, Congressman Tierney has held a two-part series of hearings on AFRICOM entitled, “AFRICOM: Rationales, Roles, and Progress on the Eve of Operations,” which explored the role of the Defense Department’s new Africa combatant command (AFRICOM) in relation to U.S. diplomatic, development, and defense interests and activities in Africa.

A copy of Chairman Tierney's speech as prepared for delivery is below:

Statement of John F. Tierney Committee on Oversight and Government Reform U.S.
House of Representatives

Center for Advanced Defense Studies Conference: "AFRICOM: An Independent Review for
the New Administration"

As Prepared for Delivery

October 28, 2009

Good afternoon. Thank you Mr. Hyman for that introduction and thank you all for being here today to discuss U.S. Africa Command. This is an important topic, and I am pleased that the

Center for Advanced Defense Studies has organized this conference to discuss the complex issues that surround AFRICOM.

The Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs has been involved with oversight of AFRICOM since it was announced in February of 2007. In response to the creation of a new Africa command, former ranking member Chris Shays and I commissioned a report by the Government Accountability Office to analyze its stand-up. The results of that analysis were discussed at a hearing before our Subcommittee in July 2008. Witnesses at the hearing included John Pendleton of GAO and Lauren Ploch from Congressional Research Service – both of whom are here today – as well as representatives from AFRICOM, the State Department, and the Department of Defense. We held a second hearing a week later with representatives from international NGOs and think-tanks to discuss non-government perspectives on AFRICOM.

Last October, the staff of the National Security Subcommittee carried out a fact-finding mission to France, Mali, Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Germany to conduct oversight over AFRICOM and its programs and components at the moment of full operational capability. They met with representatives of African and European governments, NGOs, academics, international organizations such as the UN and the African Union, and representatives of the U.S. government, including AFRICOM itself, the State Department, U.S. embassy representatives, and USAID.

Finally, we have asked GAO to do additional investigation and analysis on AFRICOM, following up on the recommendations made in its last report and assessing the command after it has been at full operational capability for over a year. I am looking forward to the results of that

investigation, and I plan to continue the robust oversight efforts that my Subcommittee has engaged in to date. In the meantime, in order to evaluate AFRICOM's progress and import, we continue to monitor, build and maintain relationships with AFRICOM's leadership, stakeholders, commentators, and critics.

I hope that today's conference can contribute meaningfully to the ongoing conversation about AFRICOM. While I am not able to stay for the full afternoon, Subcommittee staff will remain to learn from the knowledgeable group of speakers you have assembled here today.

For my part, I would like to discuss some of the issues and questions that AFRICOM raises in terms of congressional oversight and to highlight some of the areas where we still seek answers. At our first hearing over a year ago, we asked the question, "What is AFRICOM?" To a certain extent, we are still asking that question today.

It seems there are two alternative visions of AFRICOM, each of which presents its own challenges and questions for oversight. The first views AFRICOM as a simple reorganization within the Department of Defense – as an effort by DOD to allocate resources and expertise to adequately and efficiently address U.S. national security interests on the continent.

This kind of major reorganization within DOD raises a number of important issues for congressional oversight. For example, ensuring a seamless transition of Africa-focused activities from Central Command, European Command, and Pacific Command to the new Africa Command is critical to the initial and on-going success of any new command. Questions about the appropriate location of the command headquarters and the right locations for the component commands require in-depth analysis, as do decisions about the appropriate levels of personnel to staff the new command.

More importantly, perhaps, this reorganization also raises critical questions of balance. The goals of U.S. mil-mil work in Africa include increasing African nations' security capacity and professionalization of African militaries. Putting aside the myriad challenges to achieving these goals, we have to ask what success in this area would mean for U.S. interests in Africa as well as for African nations themselves. What are the implications if we successfully strengthen and professionalize militaries and not, for example, police forces? Do we risk a serious imbalance between military power and civil society and rule of law? And if so, does an internal DOD reorganization necessarily implicate questions about the role and relative size of our diplomatic efforts on the continent?

These questions bring us to a second vision of AFRICOM, which some see as a new kind of command, essentially an experimental interagency project. This conception of AFRICOM was stated in the initial rollout – which led to confusion among African nations as well as U.S. government components – but it is an idea that has persisted throughout the command's first year. In his U.S. Africa Command Posture Statement from March of this year, General Ward noted that "Africa is a complex environment requiring a new and different approach," and he emphasized throughout the Statement the importance of interagency partners. Indeed, AFRICOM's website boasts that the command "reflects a much more integrated staff structure, one that includes significant management and staff representation by the Department of State, USAID, and other U.S. government agencies."

This vision of AFRICOM raises a different set of oversight questions. Most significantly, we must very carefully examine what the idea of an integrated interagency command means for our diplomatic and development efforts. Locating a whole-of-government approach within a military command presents a tension between the importance of representing U.S. activities in Africa as peaceful and respectful of African national sovereignty and the perception that DOD is the lead agency for the U.S.'s relationship with Africa. While the coordination of our diplomatic, development, and defense activities is key to achieving a coherent foreign policy, I have serious concerns about the military taking the lead on traditionally civilian-led efforts.

Further, in order to ensure that our civilian agencies can take the lead on diplomacy and development, we need to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately between the agencies. My staff reported back from their time in Africa that State and USAID personnel felt overwhelmed by DOD's involvement with their work. One official reported that she spends 1/3 of her time coordinating with DOD even though she was already stretched thin in staffing and resources. We cannot strike the right civ-mil balance if we do not provide the civilian side with the necessary personnel and funding to effectively do their jobs.

We also have to ask what the interagency presence within AFRICOM means for the interagency components that are not within the command, such as U.S. Embassies, USAID programs, and State Department regional bureaus. Are the interagency personnel working within AFRICOM simply there to help DOD learn to coordinate better with other agencies? How will the State Department personnel in AFRICOM, for example, interact with U.S. Embassies?

And we also have to ask whether the continent of Africa is the right place to experiment with a new U.S. interagency model. With growing threats from extremist groups in both East and West Africa, the rise of transnational drug enterprises in West Africa, continuing conflicts across much of Central Africa, and the HIV/AIDS crisis affecting the entire continent, U.S. efforts to help African nations regain stability, root out corruption, and effectively address internal threats are more important than ever. Perhaps this provides the opportunity to try a new approach; at the same time, we must not forget the seriousness of our endeavors if we are to proceed with such an experiment.

In all accounts, we need to unify our message about AFRICOM's goals, strategies, and the role we intend it to play. The overarching theme of our hearings and my staff's trip to Africa – a theme that has been echoed by many in this room – is that communication about AFRICOM's rollout was mishandled. I suspect that this was in large part because the entity doing the communicating – the U.S. government – had not reached its own decisions about the contours of the new command.

For example, at my Subcommittee's first hearing last year, Theresa Whelan, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, testified that "the intent is not for DOD generally, or for USAFRICOM at the operational-level, to assume the lead in areas where State and/or USAID have clear lines of authority as well as the comparative advantage to lead."

On that same day, Secretary Gates delivered a speech to the U.S. Global Leadership Campaign in which he noted that "in recent years the lines separating war, peace, diplomacy and development have become more blurred and no longer fit the neat organizational charts of the 20th century."

So on the same day, on one side of town State and USAID were still the agency leads on diplomacy and development. On the other side of town, the roles of the various agencies were being blurred.

Similarly, the potential for confusion can be seen in General Ward's Posture Statement from this year. He notes three "strategic endstates" provided by DOD as guidelines for AFRICOM's activities. These endstates all reflect military goals. But at the same time, General Ward's description of the "strategic environment" in which AFRICOM functions highlights the problem of over-fishing off Africa's coasts and the impact this has on food security. While this is an accurate assessment of a challenge facing African's coastal nations, it raises the question of what role AFRICOM intends to play in addressing that challenge.

Before we are able to clearly and effectively communicate to Africans what our plans are for AFRICOM, we need to figure them out for ourselves.

Before closing, I want to highlight that the AFRICOM experience is instructive as we examine how the U.S. will face the challenges of the 21st Century. As we monitor AFRICOM's progress, we should be cognizant of the lessons we can learn for our government as a whole. What does

AFRICOM mean for regional vs. bilateral approaches to foreign affairs? What are the implications for U.S. Embassies around the world?

What does AFRICOM show us about our interagency system in general? For example, I am concerned that the lack of civilian capability in Africa as compared to AFRICOM's military capacity is indicative of problems that we see throughout our government due to the excessive outsourcing of civilian work. Can AFRICOM show us where we need to maintain government expertise? And what do the coordination problems on the ground mean for the National Security Council's ability to manage the interagency at an operations level?

And finally, what does AFRICOM mean for how the U.S. approaches threats to our national security? National security today is not what it was when either the Department of Defense or the regional combatant commands were created. Today's threats come not only from hostile governments but from terrorist organizations that feed off weak states and flourish in ungoverned spaces. In this environment – where education and public health efforts, improvements in rule of law, and the reduction of corruption can significantly increase a government's ability to combat these new threats – the definition of “national security interests” has arguably expanded dramatically. If we do not show leadership and foresight, this expanded conception of “national security interests” could have troubling implications for the civ-mil balance of U.S. foreign policy.

Robust oversight of AFRICOM's mission, activities, and role on the African continent will be critical. Moreover, oversight is vital to avoiding myriad pitfalls. I plan to continue to lead such efforts here in Congress.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak today. I look forward to learning the ideas and analysis that emerge from your conversations this afternoon.